

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 16, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 26: DASH ABOUT KING STREET SHUTTLE  
(COUNCILMAN SPECK'S REQUEST)

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In response to Councilman Speck's inquiry as to why the pilot DASH About program was not continued with permanent funding into FY 2003, the following information is provided.

### I. History

The DASH About King Street shuttle bus program was established in May 2001 through a demonstration grant from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation to provide free bus service from the King Street Metro Station to Market Square to be evaluated for continuing service upon expiration of the grant. The service is provided from 7:00 pm to 12:00 am on Fridays, 10:00 am to 12:00 am on Saturdays, and 11:00 am to 10:00 pm on Sundays. Service frequency is every 15 minutes. Grant funding was provided to operate the program through the end of December 2001. In December 2001, at City Council's initiative, DASH continued the service through the end of FY 2002 through a combination of DASH budget savings and one-time federal economic development grant money. For FY 2003, DASH provided a cost estimate of \$160,000 to continue the current level of service of Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday service at 15 minute service frequencies. DASH also provided a variety of options costing from \$120,000 for partial year service and 15 minute frequencies to \$190,000 for year-round service at 10 minute frequencies. These options are listed at the end of this memorandum.

### II. Objective

The purpose of the demonstration grant program was to provide an innovative service to improve access between the King Street Metro Station and Old Town, attract people to Old Town, attract new riders to DASH, increase weekend use of the DASH system, and address requests from the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA), and Old Town businesses and retail merchants for DASH for trolley service between the King Street Metro Station and Old Town on the weekends. The temporary

grant funding created the opportunity to address each of these goals through the DASH About service.

DASH About's free service, convenience, and unique appearance make it easier for visitors, residents, and employees to travel along the King Street corridor while promoting the DASH system and Old Town as a tourist and regional resident destination for shopping, dining and sightseeing. DASH About also results in fewer cars on King Street. The service has received very positive feedback from riders, business owners, and the ACVA.

### III. Ridership

DASH About ridership data have been collected since the start of the program by week and day of service (Attachment 3). However, since DASH provided DASH About riders free bus transfers, the data collected are not fully explanatory. The data indicate that since the start of the program, the average number of individual persons riding DASH About has been between 1,616 persons per weekend and 808 persons (assuming 100% of riders make round trips).

	Total One-way Trips	If 100 % Round Trips	If 50% One-way, 50% Round Trips
Friday night	192	96	144
Saturday	863	432	647
Sunday	<u>561</u>	<u>281</u>	<u>421</u>
Weekly Total	1,616	808	1,212
Holiday Average	509		

The ridership varies by time of year, weather, and the presence of special events in the City, such as parades. The highest months of ridership have been June, July and August, with the lowest months being November, December and January. If the average ridership is annualized and divided into the annualized costs (using the existing 15 minute headways), the cost per one-way trip is approximately \$1.90.

### IV. Evaluation

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the DASH About demonstration grant program and determine whether to provide continued funding in FY 2003, DASH conducted a marketing/customer service rider survey at the request of the City in October 2001 and in January and February 2002. The first survey was designed by ACVA and asked riders where they live, why they came to Old Town, how they arrived, how they heard about DASH About, and how long they planned to stay in Old Town. A summary of the results of the first survey is included as Attachment 1. These results were presented to City Council in December.

The second survey added two questions: if the DASH About was not available, would you have walked, used a car, not made the trip, or acted otherwise; and how much do you think you will

spend or have spent today in Old Town? A summary of the results of the second survey is included as Attachment 2. Because the second survey was undertaken in January and February, the results (while in some ways similar to the first survey) are probably more skewed towards City resident riders than tourist and other non-resident riders. Among the results of the second survey were the following findings:

1. 56% of respondents used the DASH About for recreational/shopping purposes, while 31% used it for traveling to their jobs and homes; 13% did not give a reason for riding.
2. 61% of respondents would have walked to their destination if DASH About had not been available and 31% would have taken a car or another form of transportation; only 6% would not have made the trip to the City. With 31% of riders avoiding a car trip, on an average Saturday one-way car trips on King Street were reduced by about 268, or 19 per hour.
3. 29% of respondents indicated they spent or would spend \$50 or more, 24% responded \$25 to \$50, and 21% said \$10 to \$25.

It is difficult to estimate the direct economic impact of DASH About service on sales at Old Town businesses, particularly due to the holiday free parking program and to an unusually mild winter, both of which had a positive impact on visitor activity. However, order of magnitude calculations can be determined using the average DASH About cost per rider of \$2.54 (based on a conservative assumption of 1,212 one-way and round-trip riders on average per weekend) and local sales, business license (BPOL), and meals tax rates. In order for the DASH About to "break even" on a direct local tax basis, each person would need to spend approximately \$212 on retail goods or approximately \$61 on a restaurant meal<sup>1</sup> for the City to recover the cost of a round trip.

Because, in part, bus service is readily available from DASH on King Street at a cost of only \$1 per trip, and given the very large portion of surveyed riders in the second survey (92%) who indicated they would have traveled to Old Town regardless of DASH About, staff determined that continuing DASH About with General Fund support at a cost of \$120,000 to \$190,000 per year was not a new initiative that could be funded in a tight budget year. Also, with only 6% of the survey respondents indicating that without DASH About they would not have come to Old Town, the economic benefits of DASH About appear less substantial than the ridership figures might indicate.

On the other hand, there is no question that DASH About was enjoyed by almost all who rode, presented a positive image for the City, and was perceived by the Old Town business community as a positive effort.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated using 1% local sales tax, 20¢/\$100 gross receipts tax and 3% restaurant meals tax.

## V. Options

The options presented by DASH for funding DASH About for FY 2003 are as follows:

9 month program (Apr - Dec), 15 minute frequencies	\$120,000
9 month program (Apr - Dec), 10 minute frequencies	\$150,000
12 month program (Jan - Dec), 15 minute frequencies	\$160,000
12 month program (Jan - Dec), 10 minute frequencies	\$190,000

These options do not include bus replacement costs which would occur at some point in time. They also do not include the cost of advertising and marketing the program. However, ACVA has about \$33,000 remaining from the Marketing Fund DASH About grant and can apply it to a continuation of the DASH About shuttle. If the DASH About is not continued, then these funds would be returned to the Marketing Fund.

Other options prepared by DASH are provided as Attachment 4.

Attachments: 1. Initial customer survey results from October 2001  
 2. Second customer survey results from January and February 2002  
 3. DASH About ridership statistics  
 4. DASH About operating/cost options

Staff: Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager  
 Gene Swearingen, OMB Director  
 Morgan Routt, OMB Analyst

**"Dash About"**



**Weekend Shuttle**

**Dash About Ridership**

May - Dec 2, 2001

55,735 riders

Avg. Saturday 1,013

Avg. Sunday 676

Avg. Friday 224

Avg. Monday Holiday 518

**Dash About Survey Results**

October 19-21, 2001

1,670 Riders

585 Respondents

35% Response Rate

Call area - 703 354

CMB  
ALEXANDRIA VIRGINIA

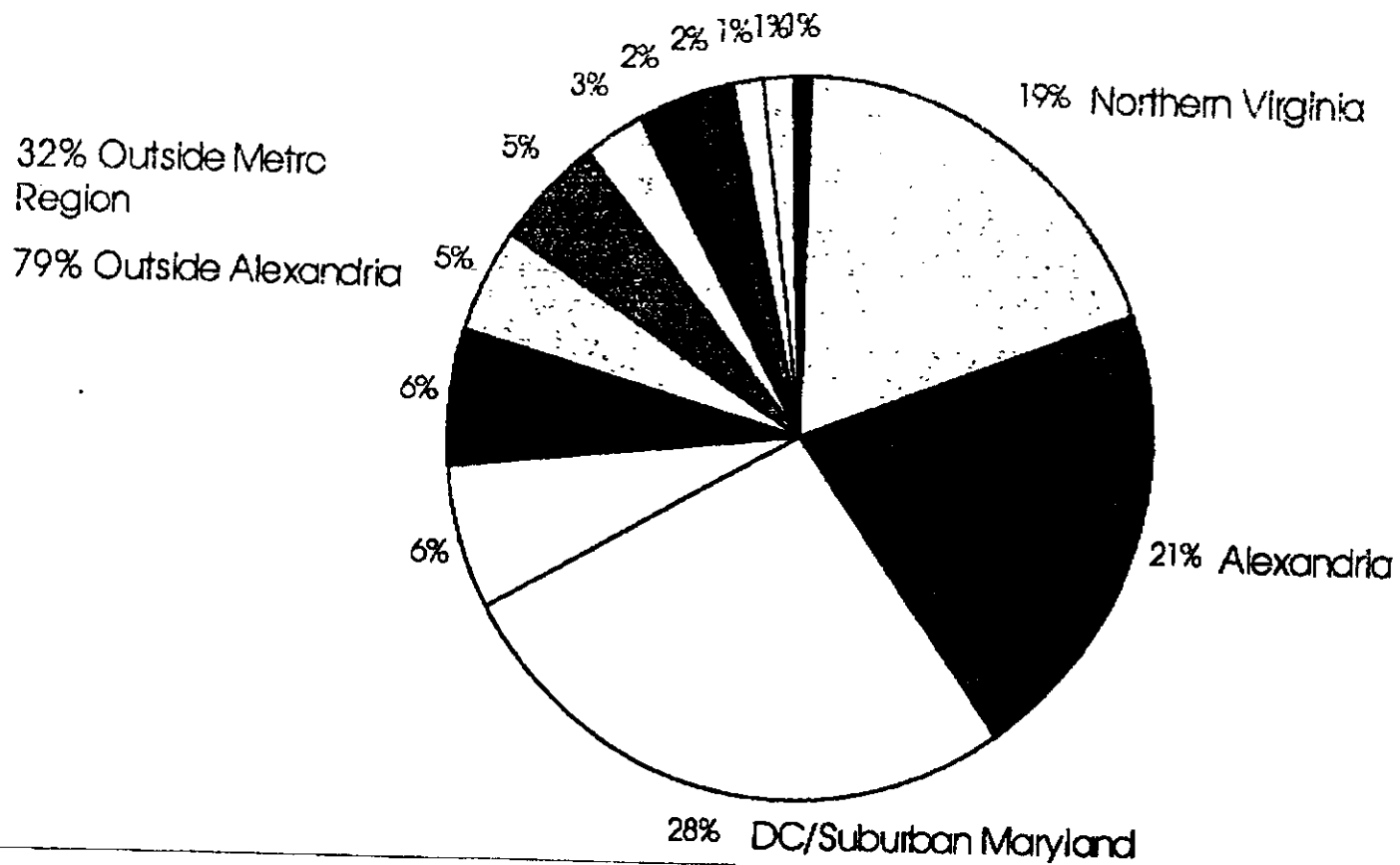
HPK-05-2002 FRI 03:50 PM ALEXANDRIA  
10.11.02 10.11.02

FAX NO. 7033703404

P. 01  
2001

Attachment 2

## Where They Live

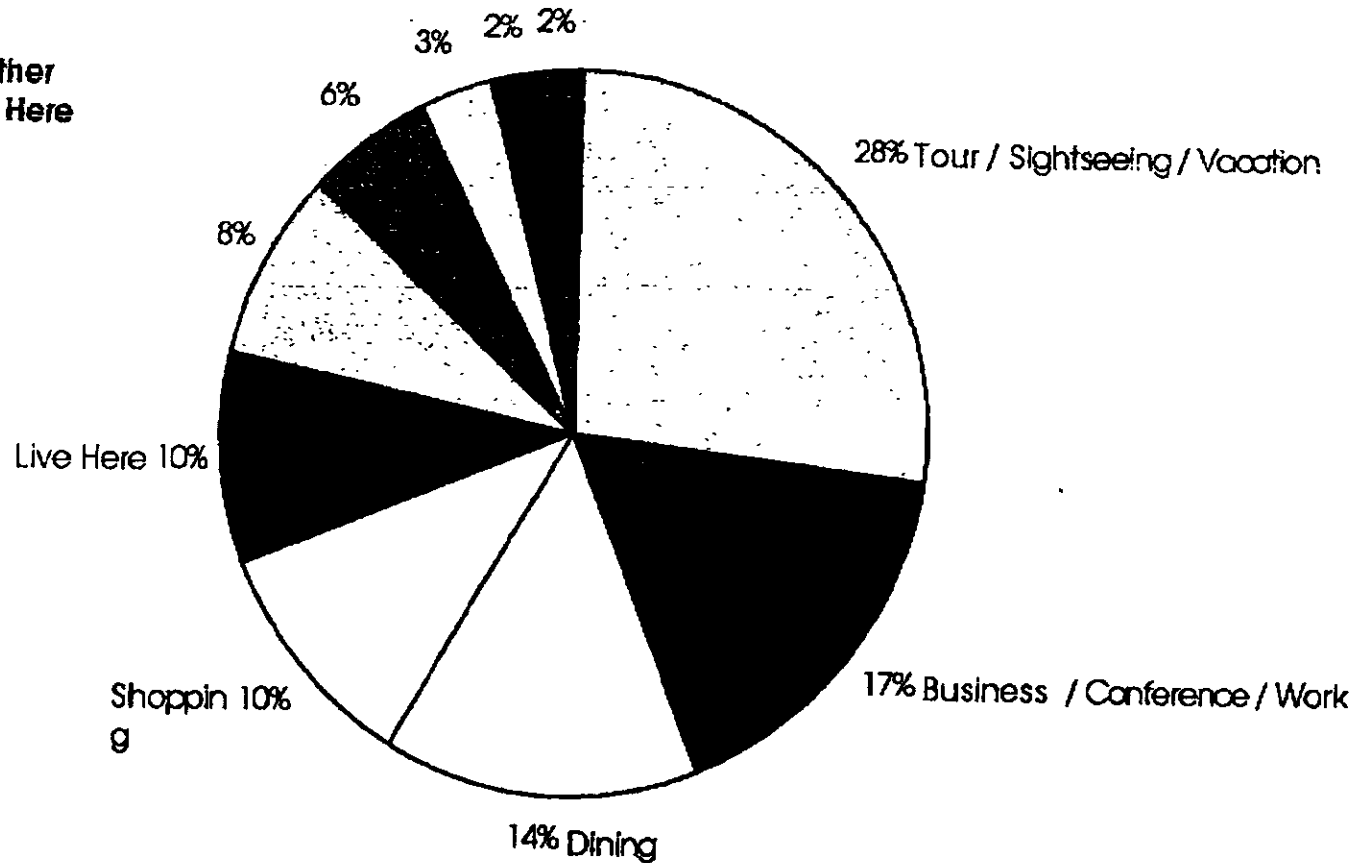


☐ NoVa 
 ☐ Alex 
 ☐ DC/MD 
 ☐ MN 
 ☐ GA, FL 
 ☐ NJ, NH, VT 
 ☐ NY 
 ☐ CA 
 ☐ TX 
 ☐ AZ, NM 
 ☐ Western VA 
 ☐ IL 
 ☐ Tidewater

# Reason They Came

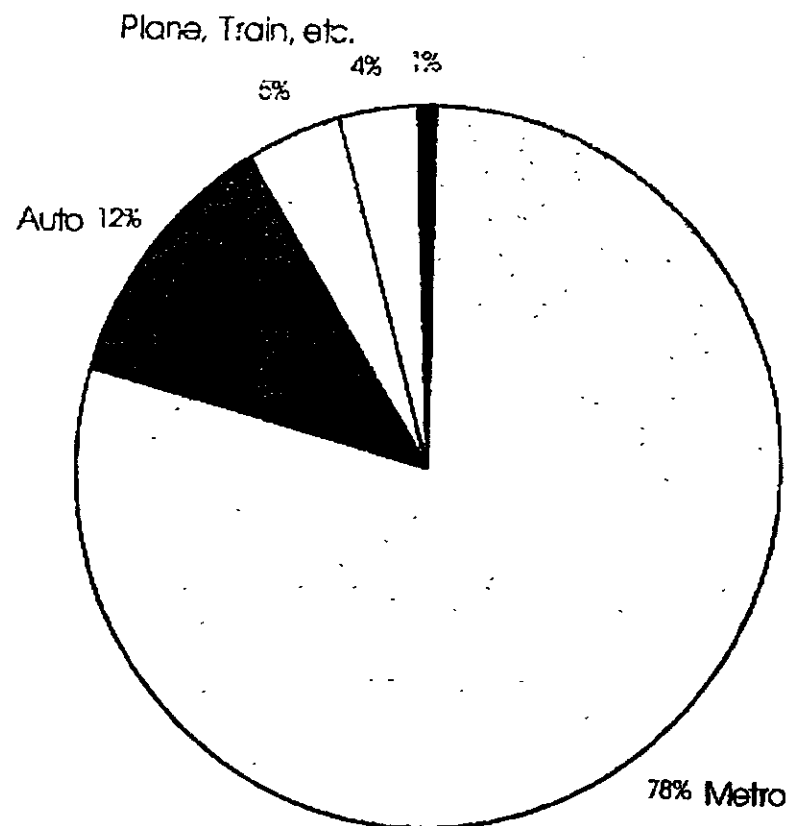
90%

Reason Other  
Than Live Here



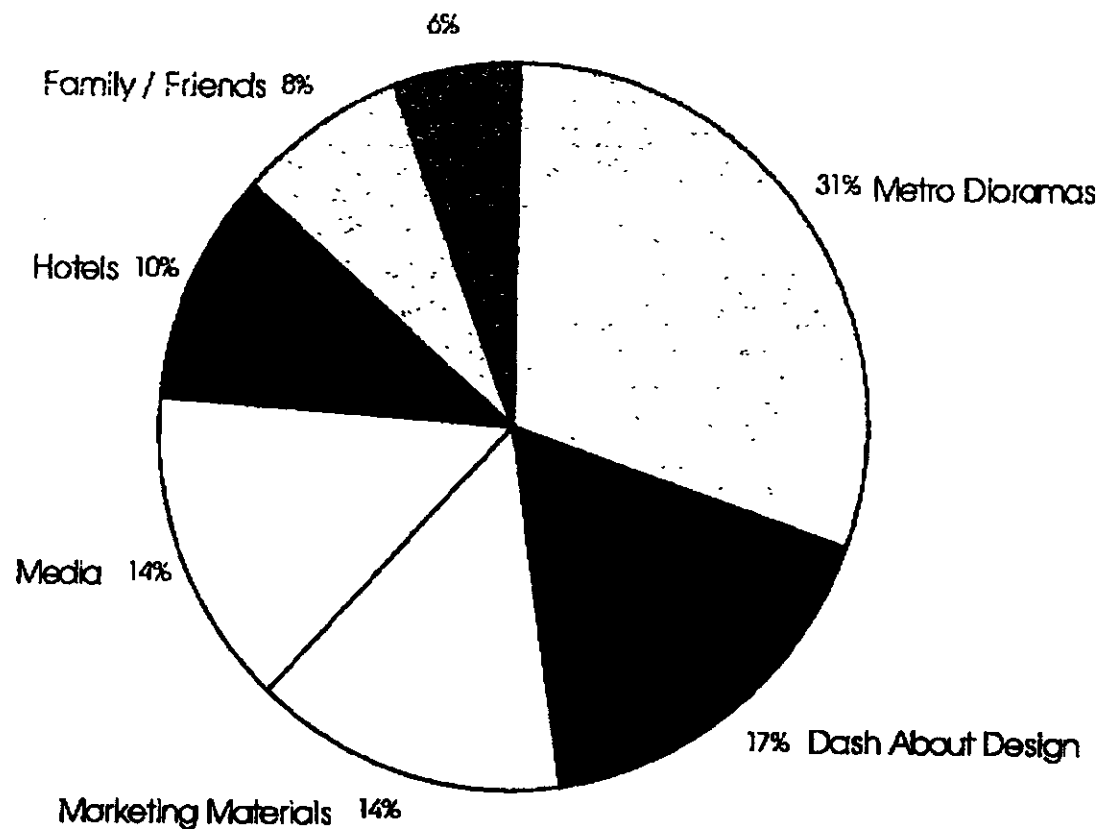
☐ Tour / Sightseeing / vac  
 ☐ Bus. / conf / work  
 ☐ Dining  
 ☐ Live here  
 ☐ shopping  
 ☐ Fun / party / wed / evt  
 ☐ Family / friends  
 ☐ festival  
 ☐ misc  
 ☐ ghost tour

## How They Arrived





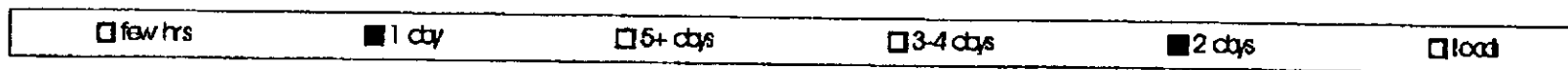
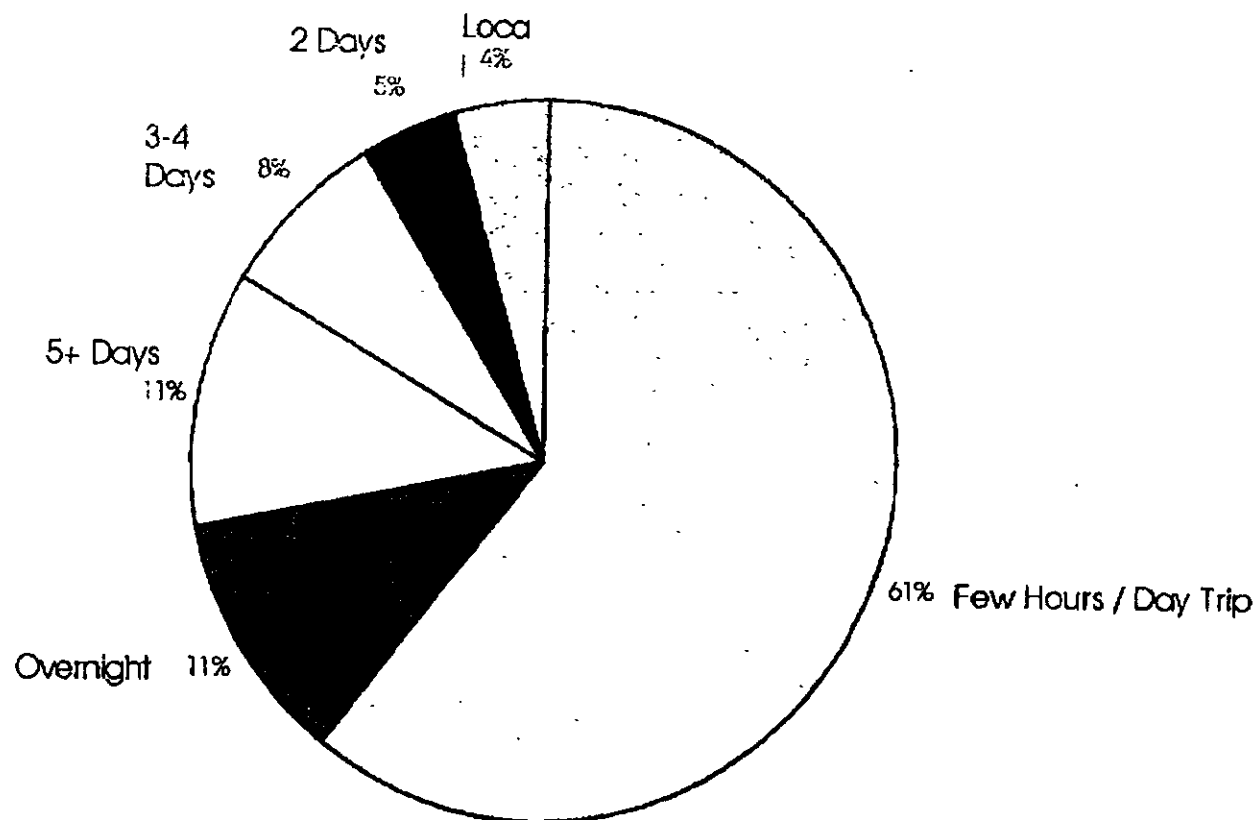
## How They Heard About *Dash About*



☐ Metro Dioramas
 ☐ Dash About Design
 ☐ Mkt Materials
 ☐ Media
 ☐ Hotels
 ☐ Family / Friends
 ☐ Other

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## How Long They Plan to Stay



## RIDER RESPONSE TO DASH ABOUT SERVICE

Overwhelmingly positive responses to the *Dash About* free service, the friendliness and helpfulness of drivers

### Results

458 "Dash About met or exceeded expectations"

5 did not like service

479 "Will use Dash About again"

4 will not ride again

320 First time riders on Dash Service

143 were occasional or regular riders of Dash



### Written Comments

Love the late weekend service

Superb concept

Superior mass transit, California should do this

Dash was a smash

Great, has introduced me to other end of King Street

Terrific, makes us feel valued as tourists

Never been to Old Town - bus makes it easy

Only came to Old Town because of bus

Made me responsible - didn't drive & drink

DC & MD should do the same

If wasn't for bus wouldn't be able to come to Old Town

Saved a lot of confusion

Too long of a wait

Traffic too slow

Would have been faster to walk

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 2002

TO: GENE SWEARINGEN, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

FROM: STOTT MASON, BUDGET ANALYST *Stott Mason*

SUBJECT: DASH ABOUT SHUTTLE BUS USER SURVEY RESULTS

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The DASH About shuttle bus service provides users with free transportation from the King Street Metro Station to Market Square. The service runs on Fridays from 7:00 pm until 12:00 am, Saturdays from 10:00 am until 12:00 am, and Sundays from 11:00 am until 10:00 pm. The program was funded partially in FY 02 with \$90,000 in state demonstration grant money that expired on December 31, 2001. Funds from the existing DASH budget (\$40,000) as well as a portion (\$40,000) of a special federal economic development grant that the City will be receiving can finance the program through the end of FY 02. A Marketing/Customer Service Survey was conducted to evaluate who is using the service and what the economic impact was of additional consumer spending.

**Marketing/Customer Service Survey for DASH About Shuttle Bus Service**

130 Dash About users were surveyed.

**What was the reason for visiting?**

56% of the group used the DASH About for recreational/shopping purposes.

17% of the group used the DASH About for work/business purposes.

14% of the group were residents of the City or traveling home.

13% of the group did not respond to the reason for visit question.

**How did you arrive?**

64% of the group arrived in Alexandria using the Metro subway.

15% of the group arrived in Alexandria by automobile.

15% of the group arrived in Alexandria using other means of transportation(taxi, walking, etc)

6% of the group did not respond to the question.

**How did you hear about Dash About?**

47% heard about the DASH About through metro personnel, word of mouth, or saw the bus when exiting the Metro station (other).

26% used Metro dioramas.

10% received a postcard telling them about the service.

9% read about the service in a news article.

5% of the group did not respond to the question.

3% learned of the service at a hotel.

**How long do you plan to spend in Alexandria?**

49% answered that they were spending a various number of hours in the City.

40% replied that they were spending a various number of days in the City.

11% did not respond.

**If the Dash About was not available, would you:**

61% of the group would walk to their destination.

22% of the group would take another form of transportation(other bus, taxi cab, etc).

9% of the group would take their car.

6% would not make the trip to the City.

2% did not respond.

**How much do you think you will spend or have spent in Old Town?**

29% of the group spent \$50 or more.

24% of the group spent \$25 to \$50.

21% of the group spent \$10 to \$25.

12% of the group spent \$5 to \$10.

9% of the group spent \$0 to \$5.

5% did not respond to the question.

**Comments and Feedback from the Survey**

The driver was very helpful & friendly.

The DASH About should run everyday.

The DASH About is a life-saver in the cold weather. Thanks.

I'd like to see the DASH about to go to 2 am, like Metro.

I feel this is a great service you offer. I feel it helps promote business in the Old Town area.

The free bus ride is good.

I live here and have found the free Dash great!

I think you should keep the service.

Thanks for giving visitors free riding. I will come again.

This service is excellent, it's especially welcome at the end of a walking trip. Very efficient.

Great service to get from Metro to Marina

Great service - plus, the bus is so cute because of the way it is painted.

It's a wonderful service for everyone who visits and lives here.

Thank you DASH. This is a wonderful plus for Alexandria.

4/3/2002

## ALEXANDRIA CONVENTION VISITORS ASSOCIATION

Dash About Ridership

May 2001 - Present

Attachment 3 214

	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Holiday		Total	Comments
<b>May</b>							
25-27	177	547	926			1,650	included Girl Scout Troop
28 Mem Day				513			
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>926</b>	<b>513</b>		<b>2,163</b>	
<b>June</b>							
1-3	96	763	563			1,422	
8-10	306	1,110	1,299			2,715	Red Cross Waterfestival
15-17	238	575	744			1,557	Special buses=5657
22-24	150	846	783			1,779	
29-1	280	1,114	685			2,079	code red
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,070</b>	<b>4,408</b>	<b>4,074</b>			<b>9,552</b>	
<b>July</b>							
4th July				606			
6-8	330	1,602	675			2,607	
13-15	366	1,413	1,078			2,857	
20-22	380	1,985	845			3,210	
27-29	496	1,745	484			2,725	rained all day on 29th
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,572</b>	<b>6,745</b>	<b>3,082</b>	<b>606</b>		<b>12,005</b>	
<b>August</b>							
3-5	320	1,742	1,148			3,210	
10-12	188	856	653			1,697	rain on 11th & 12th
17-19	266	1,229	587			2,082	
24-26	232	1,246	664			2,142	
31-3	232	1,001	871	543		2,647	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,238</b>	<b>6,074</b>	<b>3,923</b>	<b>543</b>		<b>11,778</b>	
<b>September</b>							
7-9	178	1,165	540			1,883	
14-16	178	721	472			1,371	
21-23	137	816	974			1,927	
28-30	148	582	808			1,538	
<b>Total</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>3,284</b>	<b>2,794</b>			<b>6,719</b>	
<b>October</b>							
5-8	250	911	579	497		2,237	Columbus Day
12-14	149	1,224	453			1,826	
19-21	152	823	695			1,670	
26-28	178	885	518			1,581	
<b>Total</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>3,843</b>	<b>2,245</b>	<b>497</b>		<b>7,314</b>	

4/3/2002

# ALEXANDRIA CONVENTION VISITORS ASSOCIATION

Dash About Ridership

May 2001 - Present

2-4	287	731	509			1,527	
9-11	130	660	360			1,150	
16-18	152	580	320			1,052	
23-25	130	461	291			882	
<b>Total</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>2,492</b>	<b>1,480</b>				
					Thurs		
30-2	149	1,042	402			1,593	
6-9	165	525	364		82	1,136	began Thurs route
13-16	180	758	348		93	1,379	
20-23	94	401	558	216	40	1,309	Christmas Eve
27-31	108	495	268		93	964	
<b>January</b>							
3-6	123	390	218		36	767	
11-13	104	433	305			842	
18-20	137	351	336	261		1,085	MLK Birthday
25-27	87	535	315			937	
<b>Total</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>1,709</b>	<b>1,174</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3,631</b>	
<b>February</b>							
1-3	63	552	349			964	
8-10	131	473	213			817	
15-18	148	784	478	926		2,336	President's Day Wknd
22-25	157	593	317			1,067	
<b>Total</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>2,402</b>	<b>1,357</b>	<b>926</b>		<b>5,184</b>	
<b>March</b>							
8-10	105	625	347			1,077	
13-17	178	866	392			1,436	
22-24	178	633	549			1,360	
29-31	209	1,183	395			1,787	Easter Weekend
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>3,307</b>	<b>1,683</b>			<b>5,660</b>	
<b>April</b>							
5-7							
12-14							
19-21							
26-28							
<b>TOTAL</b>							
<b>TOTAL (thru March)</b>	<b>8,442</b>	<b>37,972</b>	<b>24,678</b>	<b>3,562</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>74,998</b>	



Attachment 4

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**FY '03 DASH ABOUT COST AND SERVICE OPTIONS****#1 \$190,000 (City Manager's Submission)**

Friday:	All Year:	7P - 12A	Increase frequency to 10 min.
Saturday:	All Year:	10A - 12A	Increase frequency to 10 min.
Sunday:	All Year:	11A - 10P	Increase frequency to 10 min.

**#2 \$160,000 (Current Service)**

Friday:	All Year:	7P - 12A	15 minute frequency
Saturday:	All Year:	10A - 12P	15 minute frequency
Sunday:	All Year:	11A - 10P	15 minute frequency

**#3 \$145,000 (DASH staff recommendation)**

Friday:	All Year:	7P - 12A	15 minute frequency
Saturday:	All Year:	10A - 12A	15 minute frequency
Sunday:	Apr. - Oct.	11A - 10P	15 minute frequency
	Nov. - Mar.	12:30P - 7:30P	15 minute frequency

**#4 \$135,000 (DASH staff alternate recommendation)**

Friday:	Apr. - Oct.	7P - 12A	15 minute frequency
	Nov. - Mar.	NO SERVICE	
Saturday:	All Year:	10A - 12A	15 minute frequency
Sunday:	Apr. - Oct.	11A - 10P	15 minute frequency
	Nov. - Mar.	12:30P - 7:30P	15 minute frequency

**#5 \$123,000**

Friday:	Apr. - Oct.	7P - 12A	15 minute frequency
	Nov. - Mar.	NO SERVICE	
Saturday:	All Year:	10A - 12P	15 minute frequency
Sunday:	Apr. - Oct.	11A - 10P	15 minute frequency
	Nov. - Mar.	NO SERVICE	

**#6 \$119,000**

Friday:	NO SERVICE		
Saturday:	All Year:	10A - 12A	15 minute frequency
Sunday:	Apr. - Oct.	11A - 10P	15 minute frequency
	Nov. - Mar.	12:30P - 7:30P	15 minute frequency

**#7 \$108,000**

Friday:	NO SERVICE		
Saturday:	All Year:	10A - 12P	15 minute frequency
Sunday:	Apr. - Oct.	11A - 10P	15 minute frequency
	Nov. - Mar.	NO SERVICE	